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## APPLICATION OF ISO 9001 TO STRENGTHEN THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IN A MEGA DISTANCE UNIVERSITY

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### INTRODUCTION

In this globalization era, every organization needs quality standards to ensure that the products and services meet the expectations and needs of the public.

In 1984, the Indonesia Open University or Universitas Terbuka (UT) was established. UT was given mandates to broaden access of all Indonesians to higher education and to improve the qualification of existing teachers who were only graduated from high-school level teacher training programs into full degree level or Bachelor level. UT is therefore designed to use an open and distance learning system, which is believed to be a flexible and accessible system allowing all potential students to study regardless of their demographic, economic, and geographic situations. The university now offers almost 1,000 courses to over 600 thousand students, 80 percent of whom are practising teachers.

Starting with around 65 thousand students when UT first established in 1984, UT has now been able to maintain a student body of over 500 thousand students every semester.

A break through to operate all UT activities based on standardized quality that has brought about equal quality services for all UT students regardless of their domicile started in 2001. At that time however, there was no standard nor quality framework for open and distance learning (ODL) system available to be adopted, except for a draft of QA framework developed by the Association of Asian Open Universities (AAOU), of which UT is one of the founding member institutions.

### DEVELOPING UT QA POLICIES

As mentioned, based on AAOU's draft of QA Framework, UT started to develop policies on quality suitable for UT characteristics as higher education institution which implements ODL system. This development took around one year and involvement of all stakeholders affected by the policies. The policies are materialized in the form of a book titles *Sistem Jaminan Kualitas Universitas Terbuka* (Universitas Terbuka Quality Assurance System) in 2002. The QA policies consists of nine components in forms of 107 statements of best practices as follows.

1). Policy and planning (7 statements); 2). Human resource recruitment and development (9 statements); 3). Management and administration (21 statements); 4). Learners (10 statements); 5). Program design and development (6 statements); 6). Course design and development (14 statements); 7). Learning supports (18 statements); 8). Assessment of student learning (15 statements); 9). Media for learning (7 statements)

With these 107 statements of Best Practice, UT develops a set of QA Manuals to guide everyone in the system implement the standard operating procedures to perform the works in order to ensure the obtainment of output at the set quality standards. The QA Manuals also emphasize the interrelation among processes so that everyone performing the works understand that one's work affects the other's works, every step of the works does not stand alone because it



is a part of a cycle. For example, if there is a non-conformity in one process (e.g. delays in developing learning materials) will affect the next process (delay of printing and distributing learning materials to students). This non-conformity will therefore have significant affect on the quality of service to students.

The first priority was given to developing the afore mentioned QA Manuals for working guides of all processes, which involved around 200 staff representing all unit at UT and took no less than two years to complete. These Manuals specifically outline all processes in all aspect of UT's programs and activities. The Manuals contains steps, person in charge, timing, and quality indicators for outputs of each activity. Regardless of the continuous efforts to maximize the effectiveness of the manuals, it is noticed that the manuals are still lacking of defined measured goals for each of the process. The next step is to the manual to fit in the real condition. We believe in continuous improvement and committed that *"We write what we do, we do what we write, we check, we act, and we improve it continually"*.

### **CERTIFICATION with ISO 9001 STANDARD**

As an open university, UT basically operates like a business entity. The ISO 9001 for Quality Management System is considered as an appropriate tool to ensure quality of the management processes. Using PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) approach from ISO 9001, UT is required to continuously evaluate the system and procedures both individually and as a whole in terms of assumptions used, efficiency of practices, or whether the QA manuals have become obsolete and only be seen as something routine. The key to effective evaluation is carrying out the evaluation openly and honesty, both by internal and external auditors. Internal audit is carried out every semester by internal auditors, who have also been certified by ISO 9001 training agencies. Results of the internal audit are used for continuous improvement as well as tools to avoid similar occurrences of faulty processes. Similarly, external audit is performed every semester by invited external auditors from ISO Auditing Agencies. Results of external audit will affect the status of extension as well as termination of the ISO certification.

**Quality of management system.** The adoption of ISO system is intended to help UT implement all QA Manuals that have been developed to ensure the quality of all processes and outputs. As a big organization with almost 1,800 staff spread in the Head Office and its 37 Regional Offices throughout the Country, it is not easy to monitor and evaluate whether all the standardized procedures formulated within the QA Manuals are being implemented consistently. Therefore, the aim is not to obtain the ISO Certificate but rather to help maintain the commitment of all people within UT to consistently follow the QA Manuals in order to sustain and enhance the quality of all processes and expectedly all outputs of the university. Based on the experience of the past five years of using ISO system, we have witnessed a positive impact on staff and university performance, which has resulted in significant decrease in students' complains and problems. It is of course a "bonus" that having ISO Certificates also helps in strengthening public confidence towards UT.

The use of ISO approach started in 2005, when UT decided to obtain ISO 9001 Quality Management of the learning materials distribution performed by ther Center for Learning Material Distribution Services (Puslaba). Puslaba was chosen due to the nature of the Center's task to follow tight schedule of delivering learning materials to students. Puslaba earns the ISO



9001 Certificate for Learning Materials Services in 2006. Further efforts for obtaining ISO 9001 certifications is summarized in table below.

No	Management Aspect	Year of Obtainment	Remark
1.	Learning Material Delivery Services	2006	Mostly for activities in the Center for Learning Materials Delivery
2.	Development of Learning and Examination Materials	2007	Covering activities in the faculties, Center of Multimedia Production Center, and Examination Center
	Developing and Delivery Services of Learning & Examination Materials	2009	Integrated with ISO for Learning Materials Delivery Services
3.	Student/ Learning Services at individual Regional Offices	2007	For 11 Regional Offices
		2008	For other 12 Regional Offices
		2009	For other 8 Regional Offices
		2010	For other 5 Regional Offices
		2011	For the last (1) Regional Office
4.	Academic Administration Services	2008	Mostly for activities in the Bureau of Academic Administration, Planning and Monitoring (BAAPM)
5.	Promotion and Cooperation	2008	Mostly for activities in BAAPM
6.	Student/ Learning Services at 25 Regional Offices	2010	Merging of previous ISO certificates for 25 Regional offices into 1(one) ISO Certificate

However, upon having individual experiences, 25 Regional Offices were then integrated and the certification was merged into one ISO 9001 Certificate. The reason for merging the certification was because the 25 Regional Offices was considered to have had achieved the same level of quality and working culture. In the near future, the audit of all 37 Regional Offices will eventually be integrated into one certification only.

**Quality of academic content.** The implementaion of ISO 9001 has been effectively increasing the quality of working processes in all units at UT. However, ISO 9001 does not concern with content, and therefore can not be used to ensure the academic quality of learning and examination materials. Academic quality is important since UT is an education institution, which means one of its key quality indicators lies in academic content At academic/study program level, the quality of academic processes and products (including academic materials and graduates) are audited by the Indonesia's National Accreditation Board of Higher Education (BAN-PT). And in 2011, all Study Programs at UT has been re-accredited by BAN-PT.

It has been a long journey since UT first developed its QA system based on the AAOU draft of quality framework in 2002. Within 10 years, many new developments in both QA frameworks and standards have emerged. AAOU has now revise its QA framework and launched the new QA framework in 2010. In addition, the Indonesia's National Accreditation Board for Indonesian Higher Education (BAN-PT) has also developed a special accreditation instrument for ODL (UT), which contains quality elements and indicators to be fulfilled. Using this instrument, all UT academic/study programs have been accredited by BAN-PT. Likewise, the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) has also developed somekind of quality measures that are used to review the quality of ODL implementation by request. UT has



also used its measures, and based on ICDE's Quality Review Team, UT has been granted International Accreditation in 2005 and International Quality in 2010. As a result of UT's efforts to be externally audit by different audit/review agencies, the initial QA policies need to be evaluated to integrate all quality elements and indicators requested by those different agencies.

## LESSON LEARNT

To comply with a standard requirements from national and international accreditation bodies, since 2011 UT developed this new QA policies based on National Quality Assurance Standard for Higher Education (SPM-PT), BAN-PT, ICDE, and ISO 9001. The integration of the four systems into one comprehensive new system will allow UT to be internationally recognized while at the same time follow the national standards. The new QA policies launch in March 2012, consists of ten components in forms of 110 statements of best practices as follow: 1). Policy and planning (7 statements); 2). Human resources (8 statements); 3). Management internal (15 statements); 4). Learners and learners profiles (8 statements); 5). Program design and development (12 statements); 6). Course design and development (11 statements); 7). Learning supports (10 statements); 8). Media for learning (4 statements); 9). Learner assessment and evaluation (22 Statements); 10). Research and community services (13 Statements)

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